



# NEWS

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DR. DIANNA R. WENTZELL, COMMISSIONER

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## **CONNECTICUT TEACHER NAMED FINALIST FOR 2016 NATIONAL TEACHER OF THE YEAR**

(WATERBURY, CT)—Jahana Hayes, a social studies teacher at John F. Kennedy High School in Waterbury and Connecticut's 2016 Teacher of the Year, has been named a finalist for the 2016 National Teacher of the Year Award. She is one of four finalists announced Tuesday by the Council of Chief State School Officers, which administers the program.

"Connecticut's teachers are changing lives each and every day. When one of our finest educators is recognized on a national scale, it's exciting. It's a testament not just to what this one individual does through early mornings and late nights, but symbolizes the dedication of so many teachers across the state," Governor Dannel P. Malloy said. "If we are to be successful as a state tomorrow, it starts in our classrooms and schools today. I want to congratulate Jahana Hayes on this extraordinary recognition and for the young lives in Waterbury that she is touching."

"Jahana Hayes is the kind of teacher who transforms futures for students and shows them through her own example the powerful impact that people can have on their community and the world," said Commissioner of Education Dianna R. Wentzell. "We are so proud of Jahana. She is a true role model for educators across Connecticut – and across the nation – who seek to deliver on the promise of an outstanding education for every student."

The 2016 National Teacher of the Year will be announced in April and spend a year traveling the nation to represent educators and advocate on behalf of teachers and students. Mrs. Hayes was named Connecticut Teacher of the Year in October and was honored at an awards ceremony in November at the Bushnell in Hartford. She will undergo a final round of selection interviews as part of the National Teacher of the Year process.

Mrs. Hayes' career as an educator goes back 13 years with the most recent 11 years in Waterbury. Her role as a social studies teacher extends beyond the walls of her classroom and into the community where she encourages her students to be active in projects that help their neighbors and improve the world around them.

"It is of no benefit to anyone if a student achieves high grades and tremendous academic success if they have no desire or knowledge of how to help others," she writes.

Hayes cites personal experiences as her reason for becoming a teacher. She is the first in her family to attend college, and gratefully recalls teachers in her life who let her borrow books to read at home. Today, she passes

on this work by promoting cultural awareness and developing service learning curriculum for her school and community.

Hayes believes that, "Students need role models who are reflective of themselves." To that end, she has helped secure grants to promote education as a career, especially for minority candidates.

"Jahana Hayes has made untold contributions to both her school and community. She is an exemplary educator who serves as a remarkable testimony to the concept that, through determination, perseverance and the willingness to give and receive wise counsel, anything is achievable," Waterbury Superintendent Kathleen M. Ouellette said.

The National Teacher of the Year program, run by the Council of Chief State School Officers, identifies exceptional teachers in the country, recognizes their effective work in the classroom, amplifies their voices, and empowers them to participate in policy discussions at the state and national levels.

"Excellent teachers have an impact on students that extends beyond classroom walls," said Chris Minnich, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers. "They work to ensure every child receives a quality education that will set them on a course for success after graduation. These professionals are educators, engaged citizens and role models."

"The finalists meet young people where they are, and help to guide them, enrich their lives and build character," Minnich continued. "They are outstanding ambassadors for their profession."

President Barack Obama will recognize the National Teacher of the Year in a White House ceremony this spring.

The three other national finalists in 2016 are:

- **Nathan Gibbs-Bowling, 2016 Washington Teacher of the Year**
- **Daniel Jocz, 2016 California Teacher of the Year**
- **Shawn Sheehan, 2016 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year**

The Connecticut Teacher of the Year and Teacher of the Year finalists serve as teacher-ambassadors for public education. They are appointed to various education advisory committees and become consultants to the Commissioner of Education. They present workshops; speak at education conferences and meetings; address student, civic, college and university, and governmental groups; and operate special programs in accordance with their interests and expertise. The Connecticut Teacher of the Year also represents the state at the national level – participating in national educational forums, National State Teacher of the Year Program planning and networking sessions, and U.S. Department of Education meetings.

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